

News Release

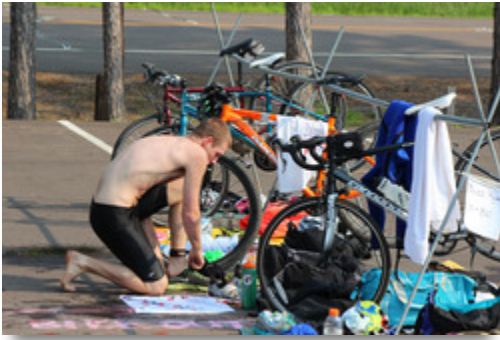
U of M Crookston Sophomore Joseph Wodarek, Six Lakes, Mich., Gets in Gear for USA Triathlon Age Group National Championships

By Elizabeth Tollefson on Tuesday, April 21, 2015It is hard to catch University of Minnesota Crookston sophomore Joe Wodarek wasting a

moment of time. The double major in agronomy and agricultural business from Six Lakes, Mich., works in the library and in dining services on campus during the academic year. And, this summer he will be scouting fields for the Northwest Research and Outreach Center (NWROC), and when time allows, he will be on the road or in the pool preparing for the USA Triathlon Age Group National Championships in Milwaukee, Wis., in August.

Wodarek has been competing in triathlons since 2012 and qualified for the age group nationals last summer at the Buzz Ryan Sprint Tri in Duluth, Minn. The soon-to-be 20 year old makes the most of his training opportunities. "When I have an hour of free time, I use it to run or bike," Wodarek says. "I have to seize every chance I can to train."

When he heads to Milwaukee this summer, he will be competing in the longer Olympic distances rather than the sprint triathlon distances he is accustomed to. The 1500m swim, 40k bike, and 10k run, are new race distances for Wodarek as are his new road bike, wetsuit, and other training gear. "I have never had the equipment or the wetsuit before when I trained or competed," he says. "I am excited to see how they will affect my performance and how they will change the competition for me."



He has been a runner since fourth or fifth grade when he wanted to building endurance for basketball. The basketball thing didn't work out for him, but the running never left. His life in the water began when he was only 6 months old. Later as a 16-year-old lifeguard, Wodarek watched several of his friends training for a triathlon, and he decided since he loved to swim, run, and bike, he would give it a try. "A triathlon simply combined all the things I was doing for fun anyway," he says.

In order to qualify, Wodarek had to place in the top three in his age group at a race sanctioned by USA Triathlon, the sport's governing body. Qualifying came as a little bit of a surprise for him because he was unaware of how he was doing in relationship to the other competitors in his age group, and he was not using equipment or gear designed to compete in the triathlon. His goal was to go out and give it the best he had. Of the three stages in the competition, Wodarek says running is his strength, and if he has a

weakness, it is probably the swim. "I don't have access to swimming regularly in open water, and it makes it difficult to be as strong as I would like to be in the swim," he says. As the summer progresses, he will spend time refining his transitions between the three legs of the competition noting how critical those transitions can be in the overall outcome. "Transitions can put you ahead or drag you down," he says. "They are an important part of the triathlon."

Wodarek came to the U of M Crookston because he wanted an agronomy degree. "I liked what the agronomy major at Crookston offered, and when I thought about what I wanted to do long term, it really fit my goals," he says. "When I came to campus for a visit, I happened to get the chance to talk to agronomy instructor Rob Proulx, and if I wasn't sold on going to school here before that conversation with Rob, I definitely was afterward."

This summer Wodarek will gain valuable agronomic experience working for the NWROC. All the while, he will be training for the biggest athletic competition of his career thus far. As one might expect, he won't be satisfied with crossing the finish line in August because this competition isn't the end, it's a beginning.

For Wodarek, the triathlon in Milwaukee is one stepping stone to bigger competitions and more challenging goals in the future.

In the photos:

Top, right: Wodarek running in the Buzz Ryan Triathlon in 2014.



Middle, left photo: Wodarek transitioning between legs at the Buzz Ryan Triathlon where he made qualifying time for the age group nationals.

Bottom, right photo: Wodarek comes in with the bike at the Tri Greenville in Greenville, Mich., in 2013.

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